

Fay Maschler

Bracingly sensible Anglo-French food served with a very special view



RESTAURANT OF THE WEEK

Sam's Riverside

★★★★☆

1 Crisp Road, W6 9DN (020 8237 1020 samsriverside.co.uk). Lunch: daily noon-3pm (4pm Sat & Sun). Dinner: Mon-Sat 6-10.30pm. Set-price weekday lunch & early evening: £17.50/20.50 for two/three courses. A la carte, a meal for two with wine, about £135 inc. 12.5 per cent service.

THE best way to arrive at Sam's Riverside is by walking along the Thames Path. This national trail bubbling up near Kemble in Gloucestershire and ending at the Thames Barrier in Woolwich gives plenty of scope — 184 miles actually. The restaurant is housed in the same building as Riverside Studios, the Hammersmith arts centre happily due to reopen next month.

The Sam is Sam Harrison who previously ran eponymous brasseries, the first in Chiswick, the second in Balham. He credits Rick Stein — now with an outlet across the water in Barnes — as his mentor.

Lunch is on one of those dazzling winter days when the sky is electric blue, the water glints, cyclists mow you down and the tide is high, but I'm moving on... to my reservation. "Fortunately," says my companion, "I inherited a sizeable skull from my father," as I duck and dive to keep the sun out of my eyes at one of the well-spaced tables near the windows.

At the far end of the dining room, beyond the handsome bar, is an open kitchen where chef Harvey Trollope is



Meal with a view: the light-filled dining room on the river. Inset, clams with braised trotter and beans



FAY'S FAVOURITES BESIDE WATER

Waterhouse Restaurant

Backed by The Shoreditch Trust, supporting young people in catering. 10 Orsman Road, N1. waterhouse-restaurant.co.uk

The London Shell Co.

"Not once did I feel like a tourist, but a Londoner walking on water" (my review). The Prince Regent, Sheldon Square, W2. londonshellco.com

Blueprint Café

A view of Tower Bridge, a new chef in Rudolphe Warner. Butlers Wharf, 28 Shad Thames SE1. blueprintcafe.co.uk

in charge. Trollope has worked for John Williams at The Ritz and here has Rowley Leigh as culinary director — two of the best in the business. The bracingly sensible Anglo-French menu sports some creative curlicues and — despite the rather cheeky emulation of The River Café's wavy font for the logo — can with some deft footwork deliver a reasonably priced meal, one with a very special view. Clams, braised trotter, white beans provide a mellifluous mix of meatiness and a potent broth for the innocuous beans to shoulder.

Responding to the grilled octopus tentacle served with potatoes crusted with pimenton and a dollop of saffron aioli, my young chum remarks that "like losing my virginity, I expected it to be stratospherically awesome, but it wasn't". That is perhaps expecting a bit much from a tentacle, but charring verging on burnt doesn't help.

Veal breast in the set menu seems to have given its all to the dynamic sauce — as veal so selflessly can — leaving a characterless clump of meat and a tough grilled leek. The swirl of Robuchon-style mash (unconscionably large amounts of butter) compensates and points towards that plus creamed spinach as must-have side dishes. Hake with crab bisque and Beluga lentils, a recommendation from the server, proves the server right.

Delia, Mary and, I'm pretty certain, Rowley know that Queen of Puddings has a crumb-in-custard base, a thin layer of raspberry jam and then a riot of meringue. Pieces of fruit, however healthy-ish they may seem, constitute lèse-majesté. Easily fixed.

Wines and drinks generally are well considered. I can recommend the Chablis Le Domaine d'Henri, Les Allées du Vignoble 2017 at £55. And then a stroll along the Thames Path.

FIVE THINGS FAY ATE THIS WEEK

● The first mince pie of the season at the British Museum before a screening of Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman*, accompanied by the Concordia Foundation chamber orchestra. Afterwards, walking in the air.

● Astonishing Svetlana Zakharova, prima ballerina of the Bolshoi, bringing Coco Chanel to elegant life in Modanse at the London Coliseum, would probably spurn the charcuterie and bread at Terroirs (pictured) that I relish afterwards.

● Uplifted by Handel's *Messiah* sung by the Cathedral Choir and Chorus at St Paul's, mood is sustained by many heavenly small plates at Andrew Wong's Kym's.



● At The KPH, where serial killer John Christie was a barman in the Forties, I start dinner with mussels and 'nduja.

● With David Ellis at our own Christmas office party at L'Escargot Soho, we both choose boeuf bourguignon.

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